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ABSTRACT

Given that people's expectations influence their behavior, it is important to examine the expectations of incoming college freshman whose beliefs and hopes may help to determine their academic and social integration, which have been linked to persistence and retention rates. Of 212 African American freshman who completed the "University New Student Census" during summer orientation, more males than females reported that the main reason they attended college and planned to graduate was to make more money. Males also indicated less interest in pursuing higher academic degrees. Fewer females than males intended to work during their first year. In addition, females and males differed regarding expectations about selection of a major and difficulty of college coursework. Males and females indicated different social expectations. More males reported interest in counseling for problems with alcohol, although the overall percentages interested were low. More females than males felt that everyone should do volunteer work and expected to be involved in campus groups, including religious activities. Many of these areas in which gender differences were found correspond to noncognitive variables, which have been shown to predict success and adjustment of nontraditional students. Other findings are reported. Contains 26 references. (JBJ)

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College Park, Maryland



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William E. Sedlacek

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Computer time was provided by the Computer Science Center, University of Maryland at College Park. The data discussed were gathered in cooperation with the Orientation Office, University of Maryland at College Park.

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COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND

Gender Differences Among Incoming African American Freshmen
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Summary

Of 212 African American freshmen who completed the "University New Student Census" during summer orientation, more males than females reported that the main reason they attended college and planned to graduate was to make more money. Males also indicated less interest in pursuing higher academic degrees. Fewer females than males intended to work during their first year. In addition, females and males differed regarding expectations about selection of a major and difficulty of college coursework. More African American females reported a belief that a declared major was better than an undeclared one, that college coursework would be stimulating and exciting, and that coursework would require more work than high school classes did.

In addition, African American males and females indicated different social expectations related to college. More males reported an interest in counseling for problems with alcohol, although the overall percentages interested were low. More females than males felt that everyone should do volunteer work and expected to be involved in campus groups, including religious activities. Of the students interested in joining formal student groups, more females intended to join a variety of groups, while more males expressed interest specifically in campus athletic groups.

Many of these areas in which gender differences were found correspond to noncognitive variables, which have been shown to predict success and adjustment of nontraditional students (Sedlacek, 1993). It is possible that noncognitive variables such as "demonstrated community service" and "preference for long term goals" may help to explain gender differences in retention of African American college students. Continued study of within-group differences among African American students may yield information useful to those providing counseling programs, orientation programs, or support services for this student population.

Introduction

Given that people's behaviors are influenced by their expectations (Rotter, Chance, & Phares, 1972), the beliefs, hopes, and anticipations of students entering college for the first time may help to determine their subsequent satisfaction with school, their ability to learn, and their ability to adjust to unexpected or novel experiences in a successful manner. In turn, these factors may influence overall academic success and social integration which have been linked to persistence and retention rates (Tinto, 1987).

One college student population which has had consistently higher attrition rates than other groups is the African American student population (American Council on Education, 1988; Siggelkow, 1991). Sedlacek (1987) found that African American students on predominantly White campuses experienced feelings of isolation and alienation. Other researchers have proposed that campus racism, lack of special counseling programs, financial difficulties and similar factors may account for the lower graduation rate of this group (Gillian, 1989, Siggelkow, 1991; Trippi & Cheatham, 1991). However, there continues to exist a need for more research to understand the experience of African American students on college campuses (Hughes, 1987).

Delworth (1989) suggested that considering within-group differences among African American college students might assist in learning about their experiences. Reid and Comas-Diaz (1990) stressed the need for examination of gender and ethnic

interactions. Instead of making between-group comparisons of students based on race (i.e. White versus African American), which is commonly done in the college student literature, researchers may need to focus instead on the college experiences of female and male African Americans to gain a better understanding of issues pertinent to this group.

Previous researchers of gender differences within this group have found that different aspects of the college environment seem to be more challenging for either males or females. Regarding Black females, Styles (1969) found that at predominantly White universities, their self-concepts were lower than those of Black males. African American women face both institutional racism and institutional sexism within the university which taken together may influence their self-esteem negatively (Greene, 1994). Although Byrd and Sims (1987) found that Black females were less apprehensive about communicating in a class which was predominantly White, the authors also discovered that lower apprehension was associated with a lower GPA. Thus, African American males may be rewarded for being more apprehensive and less talkative in class. Finally, in a study of 108 female and 66 male Black college students, Carter and Helms (1987) found that females saw themselves as "more at the mercy of natural forces than did Black men."

On the other hand, results indicate that college environments can be hostile to African American males as well. Fleming (1984) stated that on predominantly White campuses, Black males' development suffered more than that of Black females. Other

researchers reported that Black females at predominantly White universities were more assertive and self-reliant, took greater advantage of student services, and viewed themselves as more resistant than Black males to negative stimuli (Hughes, 1987; Payton, 1985). Black males were found to be less likely to consider changing majors and less likely to communicate with others about their problems (Cheatham, Shelton, & Ray, 1987; Hughes, 1987). Also, more Black males than females tended to drop out of college (American Council on Education, 1988; Trippi & Cheatham, 1991).

Thus, gender differences among African American college students have been noted, but conclusions regarding whether males or females experience more difficulties in the college environment have not been reached. In contrast, other researchers have found a lack of gender differences within African American student populations in areas such as satisfaction with the institution, peer group relations, academic integration, tendency to make internal attributions of personal problems, type of most bothersome problem, and pattern of psychological distress (Cheatham, Shelton, & Ray, 1987; Nettles & Johnson, 1987).

All of the studies mentioned above were conducted with African American students who already had begun their college experiences (i.e. classes had started). There is a lack of literature on the expectations of these students regarding what college would be like for them. As stated previously, expectations may influence subsequent behavior, including perceptions and reactions. In this

study of incoming African American freshman students, their expectations about their upcoming college experience were examined before classes had begun. Gender differences were analyzed in an attempt to understand better the preconceptions of these students as they began their college careers.

Method

The annual "University New Student Census" was administered to 2,538 entering freshmen during summer orientation at a large public eastern university. More than 90% of all new freshmen attended orientation. The 52 Census items concerned student expectations about various aspects of the college experience, including motivation for attending college, goals, and interest in becoming involved in campus activities. Of the sample, 212 students self-identified as Black, and of that group, 58% were female. Gender differences among these African American students were assessed using chi-square or multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) tests. All differences discussed were significant at the .05 level.

Results

Gender differences were found on academic expectations such as motivation for attending college, academic goals, motivation for completing a degree, work status, selection of a major, and difficulty of coursework. Also, males and females differed regarding social expectations including interest in counseling for alcohol-related problems, group identification, and involvement in extracurricular activities.

Motivation for attending college

Of the nine reasons to attend college presented, the top four selected by African American freshmen were: to get a better job, to prepare for graduate school, to develop [myself] generally, and to make more money. Although similar numbers of males and females agreed that they attended college in order to get a better job, gender differences were found on the other reasons. Of the respondents who selected preparing for graduate school as their primary reason for attending college, 73% were female. Sixty nine percent of those attending college to develop themselves generally were also female. In contrast, more males chose making more money as the main reason for deciding to go to college.

Academic goals

In addition to differences in motivation for attending college, gender differences were found in the students' stated goals, specifically in the highest academic degree to be obtained. More females than males indicated an intent to pursue higher educational goals. Of the freshmen who reported that a medical degree was the highest degree they intended to obtain, 77% were female. Of those who selected law degree, 69% were female; for doctoral degree, 63% were female.

Motivation for completing a degree

Besides motivation to attend college and degree to be obtained, African American females and males reported different reasons as to why they wanted to complete their degree. Of the freshmen who indicated that they would most likely complete

graduation requirements because college graduates earn more money, 67% were male. Gender differences were noted in other motivations for graduating with a degree as well. For example, of respondents who indicated that they needed a degree in order to enter graduate/professional school, 69% were female; 73% of the freshmen who reported their interest in ideas and pursuit of knowledge as motivation to graduate were female. Other options which did not differ by gender included: a degree is the only way to enter my chosen career and parents/relatives expect me to [obtain a degree].

Work status

In addition to having different academic motivation and goals, incoming African American female and male freshmen indicated different expectations about work status and group identification. For their first year on campus, most of the students reported that they did not plan to work, and 57% of those students were female. Of the freshmen planning to work in federally-funded work/study programs or to obtain other on-campus work, the majority were female. In contrast, 60% of the freshmen intending to work off campus their first year were male.

Other academic concerns

African American females were more likely than males to agree that having a declared major was better than being undecided, that courses would be stimulating and exciting, and that college coursework would require more concentration and studying than high school classes.

Counseling interests

More males than females reported an interest in seeking counseling for problems with alcohol, although the mean for males still indicated that they were not very interested in this type of counseling.

Group identification

Gender differences were found regarding which formal group respondents expected to be associated with during their first year. Of the nine options, the top three chosen were: no formal group, residence hall group, and campus athletic group. Twenty three percent of African American respondents did not expect to be identified with any formal group; of these, 59% were female. Sixty six percent of the freshmen expecting to identify with a residence hall group were female. Finally, 85% of those indicating that they expected to be involved with a campus athletic group were male. In fact, in every formal group category except campus athletic group, the majority of respondents were female. Some examples included: campus academic group (74% female), campus non-academic or social club (71% female), and off campus organization (64% female).

Through a MANOVA, significant gender differences were found for nine of the twenty six items related to general expectations and attitudes toward college. Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for the significant items.

Involvement in extracurricular activities

In a related item, gender was found to be associated with intention to participate in different extracurricular activities.

More females agreed that everyone should do volunteer work, and more females also expressed an interest in joining a campus club or group. Also, females were more likely to expect to be involved in religious activities while at school.

Expecting to participate in intramural sports was more frequently reported by males, which is consistent with the earlier finding that more males expected to associate with a campus athletic group for their first year. Following one or more of the university's athletic teams was also more likely for male respondents.

In summary, gender differences among African American freshman students who had not started classes yet were found in their expectations of college, ranging from academic motivation and goals to extracurricular interests and work status.

Discussion

The discovery of within-group differences among African American freshmen should not be too surprising. In 1990, Sue and Sue observed that within-racial group differences often can be much larger than between-racial group differences. However, the challenge becomes to utilize this information about incoming African American freshman students so that their college persistence, satisfaction levels, and retention rates are maximized. As Hawkins (1989) stated, "schools that recruit and accept minority students have the obligation to create a supportive environment...[with] appropriate advising and counseling [services]..." (p. 176) to help these students succeed. One of the

keys to planning such "appropriate" programming may lie in determining the specific needs and expectations of African American students, both male and female.

Using noncognitive variables as a framework for examining within-group gender differences

A useful organizing principle with which to interpret these findings concerns noncognitive variables as valid predictors of college success for nontraditional students (Sedlacek, in press). Many of the areas in which these African American males and females differed correspond to noncognitive variables. For example, more African American females than males reported an intention to pursue graduate work, possibly indicating that these females demonstrated a "preference for long term goals," a noncognitive variable that has been shown to predict college success for nontraditional students (Sedlacek, 1993). Bohn (1973) found that Black students who made plans were more successful than those who didn't. Thus, their ability to strive for long term goals may explain Black females' high graduation rates compared with their male peers.

Regarding work status, group identification, and involvement in extracurricular activities, which correspond with the noncognitive variables of "demonstrated community service" and "successful leadership experience," several points can be made. First, the primary group affiliation and activities anticipated by African American males was athletics. For females, a wider variety of groups including residence hall groups, academic groups, and social groups were considered as potential activities in which to

participate in college. Also, more females expected to be involved with religious activities and volunteer work. Mallinckrodt and Sedlacek (1987) found that African American students who used the campus gym were more likely to stay in school. African American males' stated interest in athletics may provide an opportunity for these students to gain a sense of community and to acquire leadership skills, factors which predict success for nontraditional students. However, the African American females indicated intentions to get involved with a wider variety of extracurricular activities which may provide them with a stronger cultural community and more opportunity to be a leader, which could account for the higher retention rates of African American female students.

Finally, the students' expectations about academic issues can be compared with the noncognitive variable of "realistic self-appraisal" (Sedlacek, 1993). More African American females than males expected that college coursework would require a significant amount of concentration and studying and that courses would be stimulating. If these opinions result in actions such as spending more time studying, obtaining tutoring assistance if needed, and being interested and involved in classes, then certainly, Black females may experience more success than Black males in the college environment. Recognizing that the transition from high school to college may involve some academic adjustments may be an important part of "realistic self-appraisal."

Future directions for research and practice

Assessing the different expectations of African American incoming freshmen is a useful first step in the process of identifying ways of assisting these students in the transition to college life. Future research efforts could be directed toward a longitudinal study of how African American males and females deal with disillusionment when their expectations are not met. Possibly there are gender differences in how they cope with disappointment. Hughes (1987) found African American males and females had different adjustment patterns on campus.

More research is also needed in clarifying how these students form their expectations, whether they get information from friends, parents, the media, or other sources, to prepare them for the college experience. Interviews or open-ended survey questions may be more useful in learning why African American males may value shorter term goals such as earning more money over longer term goals such as obtaining a graduate degree.

Evaluations of successful retention programs for entering African American college students, such as The Bridge (Gold, Deming, & Stone, 1992), need to be conducted to determine whether these programs are equally effective for both males and females. Also, Kramer, Taylor, Rich, & Udarbe (1993) proposed a method for creating individualized academic plans for freshmen. Recognizing the uniqueness of each African American student, including within-group gender differences, may yield plans that are more suited to these students' needs.

Findings of within-group gender differences among African American college students may be more helpful to researchers and practitioners when placed within a theoretical context. It is proposed that noncognitive variables are useful as a framework to account for gender differences on academic and social expectations of incoming African American freshmen.

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Table 1

Means* and Standard Deviations of African American Freshman Expectations by Gender Where Differences Were Found**

Item	<u>MALE</u>		<u>FEMALE</u>	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<u>Academic Concerns</u>				
Overall, I would say that having a declared major is better than having an undecided major.	2.83	1.05	2.50	1.10
I expect that, for the most part, my courses will be stimulating and exciting.	2.43	0.72	2.16	0.77
I <u>do not</u> expect coursework at [this university] to require more concentration and studying than my high school classes.	4.54	0.77	4.73	0.52
<u>Counseling Interests</u>				
I am interested in seeking counseling for problems with alcohol.	4.24	1.25	4.62	0.93
<u>Participation in Extracurricular Activities</u>				
Everyone should do some volunteer work.	2.80	1.00	2.45	0.91
I expect to participate in some form of intramural sports at [this university].	2.29	1.14	3.01	1.21
I expect to be involved in religious activities while at [this university].	3.27	1.06	2.77	1.14
I closely follow one or more [of this university's] athletic teams.	2.33	1.21	3.25	1.33
I want to join some campus club or groups.	2.48	1.07	1.61	0.75

*1=Strongly Agree; 5=Strongly Disagree

**Significant at .05 level using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA)